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The Impact of Soviet Jewish Immigration on Israeli Politics and Policy

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The Impact of Soviet Jewish Immigration on Israeli Politics and Policy

**Bernard Reich,
Noah Dropkin, and
Meyrav Wurmser**

Preface

The concept of immigration to Israel (then Palestine) of Jews confronting danger and deprivation has been a central theme of the modern political Zionist movement since its founding in the nineteenth century. The basic goal has been to provide a haven for Jews confronting anti-Semitism and seeking to escape persecution. They would come to a Jewish state where Jews would govern themselves. This has been a *raison d'être* of the modern State of Israel since its independence in 1948.² Large numbers of individual Jews and even whole communities have migrated to Israel from numerous countries around the world. Each immigrant group has had its own characteristics defined by reasons for leaving the place of origin, decisions to immigrate to Israel, size, political and socio-economic background, and impact on the Israeli system, among other factors.³

The current wave of Jewish immigration from the Soviet Union to Israel is, in virtually all respects, different from its predecessors. The primary purpose of this study is to address the impact of the ongoing wave of Soviet Jewish immigration on Israel's political system and policies.⁴

Although various aspects of Soviet Jewish immigration have been studied, the main focus has been on such questions as the status of Jews in the Soviet Union, Soviet refusal to allow emigration, the destination of immigrants, the effect of the immigration question on United States-Soviet Union relations, and the impact of the immigration on the Arab-Israeli conflict.⁵ In addition to these

themes, Israel and the international Jewish community have also studied the practical aspects of emigration-immigration and integration-absorption, whether the immigrants go to the United States, Israel, or elsewhere. Even the specific issues of integration, housing, education, social services, and employment have not been scientifically or systematically examined, although they have been the focus of much of the discussion. Much of the writing on this issue thus far has been journalistic in nature, and often grand conclusions are drawn from minimal samples and other information nonsystematically acquired.⁶

Introduction

Among the new policies of Mikhail Gorbachev was the emigration from the Soviet Union of large numbers of Soviet Jews, many of whom have opted for immigration to Israel. The numbers grew dramatically in the latter months of 1990, and it appears that this trend will continue at least in the near term. Although estimates vary, it seems likely at least 500,000 Soviet Jews will have arrived in Israel over the few years since 1990. Some, including prominent Jewish leaders and major Jewish organizations in Israel and the United States, have suggested the number may reach one million by 1995.⁷

The new Soviet immigration to Israel is not only larger than that of recent years, it is also qualitatively different in a number of ways, including such factors as area of origin within the Soviet Union, age, training, and ideological-religious background and commitment. Emigration of Soviet Jews from the Soviet Union to Israel was among the elements of the policies of Mikhail Gorbachev. A decision by the Soviet Union to permit essentially unlimited, if not unfettered, emigration of Soviet Jews to Israel became an important factor in a number of spheres, including United States-Soviet relations.

Soviet-Arab, and Soviet-Israeli relations. It has also had an effect on the Arab-Israeli conflict, as well as United States-Israeli relations and internal Israeli political, economic, and social developments. While many of these themes relating to Soviet Jews have been the focus of international attention, and some have been carefully examined, one sector which remains of lesser attention has been that of the current and future political roles of these new immigrants to Israel in the Israeli political system.

The Exodus of Soviet Jews

The emigration of Jews from the Soviet Union and their immigration to Israel has been the subject of substantial concern over several decades. The United States became involved in the issue of the treatment of Soviet Jews in various administrations with such legislation as the Jackson-Vanik amendment which linked United States trade policies with the treatment of Soviet Jews. In the Reagan administration, Secretary of State George Shultz focused on the plight of Soviet Jews as a matter of personal and official concern during his visits to Moscow and in other dealings with the Soviet Union, as did President Reagan at various summit meetings and in other diplomatic-political exchanges with Gorbachev.

Until recently, the focus was on the treatment of Jews within the Soviet Union and on securing for them the right to emigrate and travel to Israel or the United States. Increasingly, under Mikhail Gorbachev, the issue changed as emigration became more possible and encompassed the location of potential immigrants. Also at issue was whether they would eventually reach the United States or Israel. There was a "tug of war" between and among Jewish and non-Jewish organizations and forces primarily in the United States and Israel over the eventual destination of the Jews who were able to secure release from the Soviet Union.

Decisions made under Gorbachev allowing Jewish emigration in growing numbers shifted the nature of the problem. It moved from one of securing rights in the Soviet Union (including the right to emigrate), to where they would go and the problems of dealing with emigration at its point of arrival. This increasingly posed different issues, many political.

It is perhaps crucial to reiterate the obvious. The exodus of Jews from the Soviet Union (and its former Eastern European bloc) has been a goal of

Israel and the world Jewish community over decades. There has never been, there is not now, and there likely never will be, a question of not allowing all who wish to immigrate to Israel to do so. That was, and remains, the central rationale for the creation and continuation of an independent Jewish state. Thus, no matter the financial or other costs, Israel will seek to accept and absorb the flow of immigrants. Simcha Dinitz, the chairman of the Jewish Agency which has significant responsibility for immigrant absorption, has summarized this perspective as follows: "We are going to get them out as quickly as we can, regardless of the difficulties it creates here. Because if we wait, the doors could close and it could be too late."⁸

Overwhelming the System

The relatively slow pace of Soviet Jewish immigration to Israel that was the case before 1990 and even in the early months of that year changed dramatically by year's end. By late December 1990, the Jewish Agency was predicting arrival in Israel of between 1200 and 1500 immigrants daily, compared to recent years, when this number would take weeks or months to achieve. By mid-December 1990, more than 1000 immigrants were arriving daily. On 23 December 1990, the *Jerusalem Post* reported: "Record 7,000 Soviet immigrants are flown in over the weekend, as efforts intensified to rush Soviet Jews to Israel from a country rapidly descending into chaos."⁹

Although Soviet in origin, those immigrants came primarily from East European transit points such as Warsaw and Budapest. The Jewish Agency sought to expedite the flow, given the growing tensions and problems in the USSR, and special permission was granted even for planes to land on *Shabbat* (the Sabbath). At the same time, El Al and other airlines added additional flights to expedite the flow. Summarizing the immigration, the *Jerusalem Post* stated, "this exodus {is} unprecedented in its dimensions in Jewish history."¹⁰

As the pace of immigration increased, so did the need to provide essential logistical measures. The first issue was how to get the Soviet Jews from the Soviet Union to Israel. The process required, among other elements, special El Al flights to pick up Jews stranded in various European capitals, permission for otherwise not-permitted flights on the Sabbath to land in Israel, and various other special

arrangements. The clear and obvious basic needs of housing and transition assistance for the immigrants were addressed upon their arrival.

The sudden growth in immigration taxed Israel's resources and facilities, and a coordinated national effort was deemed essential.¹¹ Costs of the massive immigration can be measured partly in fiscal terms and partly in required services and support. Although precise information is difficult to identify, and costs and needs will vary considerably across the group, clearly the financial requirements for absorption are substantially higher than anyone had predicted in the past few years. Billions of dollars will be required to meet the needs of the new immigrant waves (overwhelmingly Soviet in origin, but also including the emergency airlifts of the Falashas from Ethiopia).¹² A second concern is adequate and sufficient housing. The sudden influx has created housing shortages as well as an increase in housing costs. A third area is jobs. Israel's unemployment rate was more than nine percent in mid-1990 and has grown with an influx of new job seekers, many of whom will be unable to be employed in professional sectors as they were in the USSR.

The massive growth of immigration to Israel toward the end of 1990 resulted from a number of factors that could all be subsumed under a general rubric: the general deterioration of the social, economic, and political fabric in the USSR. Whether or not a specific set of events or developments could be identified to suggest a collapse of the system (real or possible), the basic situation had deteriorated to the point of legitimate speculation about such a turn of events. This clearly led to an increased desire for emigration and an Israeli perspective that expediting the process was essential. As a consequence, the numbers grew dramatically.

Concerns about the future well-being of Soviet Jews took a number of forms and forums. A *Jerusalem Post* editorial¹³ summarized much of the Israeli perspective in this manner: "Traditionally, civic turmoil bodes ill for Jews. As always, their role as scapegoat is rationalized by apparent facts.... And although there has been relatively little physical violence against them, new immigrants relate that they had been made to feel decidedly unwanted." Soviet Jews realized they had to leave a crumbling system before it became impossible to leave for one reason or another (for example, emigration might be

stopped or the infrastructure might make it impossible). Developments in December 1990 (such as Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze's resignation) seemed simply to "confirm" existing suspicions and concerns. The conclusion of many Israelis as well as Soviet Jews was relatively straight forward and summed up by a *Jerusalem Post* editorial comment: "Clearly, the extrication of Jews from the Soviet Union must be effected immediately."¹⁴

Who Are They? Basic Characteristics

The Soviet immigrants of 1990-1991 are in various respects different from many of their predecessors who arrived in Israel over the previous four decades, differing even from other recent arrivals from the Soviet Union. Also, they differ from the Ethiopian immigrants who arrived by special arrangement in emergency airlifts in 1991.

Table 1: Numbers of Soviet Immigrants

1989	12,814
1990	184,803
January	4,591
February	5,746
March	7,380
April	10,641
May	10,202
June	11,015
July	15,395
August	17,484
September	18,725
October	20,324
November	25,186
December	35,070
January 1991	13,360
February	7,164
March	13,336
April	16,286
May	16,048
June	20,473
July	10,325
August	8,688
September	9,877

Numbers are drawn primarily from data provided by United Jewish Appeal and newspaper sources.

Numbers. Although generalizations are always problematic, and it is difficult to be absolutely precise because of the continuous flow, the data for 1990 seem to describe the migrants during that year and reflect accurately the continued flow in 1991.

Table 2: Ages of Soviet Immigrants		
Age Group	1990 Numbers	Jan-June 1991
0-5	14,675	6,216
6-9	12,652	5,464
10-14	14,184	6,366
15-18	10,008	4,656
19-24	12,044	6,846
25-44	64,004	28,343
45-59 (women)	12,343	7,196
60-64 (women)	5,983	2,832
45-64 (men)	14,735	8,108
65-70	11,246	5,828
71-75	4,712	2,517
76-80	3,958	2,382
81-85	1,976	1,332
86+	880	495
Total	183,400	88,719

Data from Ministry of Immigrant Absorption.

Age. The Soviet Jews who arrived in Israel between January 1990 and June 1991 are relatively young.

Table 3: Background of Soviet Immigrants		
	1990	Jan-June 1991
Engineers	24,713	11,357
Doctors and Dentists	6,059	2,163
Nurses and Paramedics	4,433	2,218
Writers, Artists, and Musicians	5,109	2,076
Senior Technicians and Technicians	12,400	5,905
Industry and Construction	15,141	8,846
Professionals in Humanities and Social Sciences	4,293	2,155

Data from the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption.

Background. By all measures, most of the new immigrants are well educated, with estimates running as high as 75 percent of the group possessing a university or equivalent education. Many were professionals in the USSR.

Table 4: Places of Origin for Soviet Immigrants		
Area or City of Origin	1990	January - June 1991
Russia	44,535	26,557
Leningrad	14,514	4,099
Moscow	10,032	10,401
Ukraine	58,528	23,314
Kiev	12,228	6,226
Odessa	6,693	1,987
Kharkov	5,570	2,145
Belarus	23,473	10,255
Minsk	7,383	3,404
Gomel	7,122	2,648
Moldova	11,993	8,529
Kishinev	7,709	4,696
Baltics	7,462	1,858
Riga	2,906	738
Vilnius	2,389	520
Asian Republics	37,417	18,206
Tashkent	10,148	5,652
Baku	7,327	3,118
Samarkand	2,079	961
Georgia	1,616	669
Total	183,400	88,719

Bold numbering indicates total immigration from that republic.

Data from the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption.

Place of Origin. Based on occupation data and socio-economic status, it would appear that most of the immigrants are from urban areas. Within the Soviet Union, the concentration appears to be primarily from Russia and the Ukraine.

One factor that may turn out to have an impact is the question of the "Jewishness" of the immigrants. While an overwhelming majority (94.5 percent) of the Soviet Jews interviewed for the October 1990 Public Opinion Research of Israel (PORI) poll¹⁵ said both parents are or were Jewish, over 50 percent also indicated their level of Jewish identity was either cultural or due to family ties only. Only 1.7 percent said they were a "practicing religious

believer." Five percent, when asked about their Jewish identity, replied "Zionist."

This information combined with the professed attachment to the state of Israel would seem to place them into the traditional pioneer mold: secular Zionist. There has been concern in some quarters that the immigration includes non-Jews. Interior Minister Arye Deri has argued that only about five percent are non-Jews. Nevertheless, Absorption Minister Yitzhak Peretz claims that the figure is over 30 percent.

How the Israeli system decides to treat this issue may have political impact. Israeli officials have been criticized because of a difference of approach on this issue between Soviet and Ethiopian immigrants. Amending the Law of Return has even been suggested to deal with this matter.

The immigrants who have formed the bulk of the newcomers have a number of important characteristics. Among other factors, this is more of an emigration from the Soviet Union than an immigration to Israel. That is, the immigrant group consists overwhelmingly of those who have chosen to leave the Soviet Union because of various factors overwhelmingly of a negative social, political, or economic nature.

Thus, rather than making *aliya* to Israel for reasons of ideology or religion or other factors, they have been "forced" to flee the Soviet Union for Israel not necessarily by choice, but to ensure their survival. It is not "Jewish" or "Zionist" in the traditional and usual sense of those terms. They are, instead, searching for peace, security, and a decent future. They wish to leave a country characterized by anti-Semitism, general insecurity, and economic and social deprivation.

Nevertheless, there seems to be little question about the desire of the Soviet Jews to come and live in Israel. The October 1990 PORI study indicates that most Soviet Jews left the USSR because of insecurity and anti-semitism. Furthermore, 84 percent listed Israel as their first choice of place of residence even when given any nation as an option. Nearly 90 percent responded they were very likely to remain in Israel for at least the next few years. At least in the short term, this is likely to be the case, although partly because of a lack of available alternative points of destination, rather than commitment to Israel.

The Absorption Process

Among the factors that will affect the political benefits and losses from immigration is the immigrant perception of the "success" or "failure" of their process of immigration and integration. This process involves a number of both governmental and semi-governmental elements and agencies of the Israeli system, and a number of personal and institutional political factors. Among the critical players are the Jewish Agency and the Government's Ministries of Absorption and Housing in the first phase and, of course, virtually all ministries in subsequent phases.

On 9 January 1990, Simcha Dinitz, Chairman of the Jewish Agency, was quoted: "Israel has never been better prepared to absorb a wave of immigration."¹⁶ Whether this was the case or not, the dramatic levels of immigration in subsequent months soon showed that Israel was not prepared to absorb any significant wave of immigration efficiently. As the numbers grew in the last months of 1990, the system seemed to collapse under the weight of the new wave of immigration and the apparent inability of government and semi-government agencies to cope. Problems of adequate housing, training, education, and employment became obvious and immediate.

Large Soviet immigration brings with it a multiplicity of problems which tend to grow geometrically with the growth of the immigration group. Clearly, the success or failure of the authorities in dealing with problems facing the immigrants, such as language, housing, and jobs, will have political ramifications. Successful integration will likely be rewarded with votes; failure may lead to votes for the party out of power. The need to become functioning members of the new system is the first concern of immigrants. This will take time, especially given the current situation and the needs of immigration. The year 1992 may be "too soon" for many to reach a point of political "ripeness" or readiness to play a significant role in Israeli politics.

Concerns of the New Immigrants

As might be expected, the new immigrants were faced with the issues faced by many new immigrants in many locations. Their concerns are overwhelmingly practical. There are problems with acculturation, language, housing, appropriate

employment, life style, education, medical, and other social welfare requirements. Along with other institutions, Israel's universities are likely to be further overloaded by Russian immigrants seeking higher education in Israel. In a survey published in June 1991, immigrants identified employment and housing as their most pressing problems.

The Parties and the Immigrants

For Israel's political parties, the large Soviet immigration presents a challenge and an opportunity in the potentially substantial number of new voters in future Knesset and other elections. An examination of party activity among the *olim* (immigrants) aimed at gaining their support in the 1992 and subsequent Knesset elections points to several general conclusions. Although most political parties engage in some activity among the newcomers, it is limited.

All party activities (or inactivities) are based on two general and widely-held yet contradictory conceptions: (1) Russian opinions are dominated by anti-communist and anti-socialist sentiments, and thus they will tilt to the right; and (2) newcomers represent a highly educated and cultured group of voters, similar to the Israeli voters who tend to tilt to the left. There is intensive activity within the small right wing parties (Tehiya, Tzomet, and Moledet), who believe that their right wing ideology will be readily accepted by the immigrants, whose main priority is to assure the safety and security of their new haven.¹⁷

Within the small left-wing parties, there is no unified level of activity. While Mapam could be considered the most active party throughout the political spectrum,¹⁸ Shinui shows almost no activity at all. Very intensive activity, characterized by strongly religious orientation, has been central to the religious parties such as Mafdal, Agudat Yisrael, Degel Hatora, and Shas.¹⁹ Their efforts include the establishment of *ulpanim* for the study of Judaism and the Hebrew language, financial help to needy families, hospitality during Jewish holidays, and youth group activity. Most active among the religious parties is Shas, which uses its control over the Ministry of Absorption to help assure political gain.

The major parties, Likud and Labor, potentially have the most to gain, or to lose, in the effort to

entice the new immigrants to their camps. Both have considered this factor.

Likud feels newcomers' votes will be determined more by emotions and less by clear political thinking. According to this concept, the *olim*, as people coming from what until recently was a communist totalitarian country, will be reluctant to vote for any political party reminiscent of socialism. This attitude was expressed by member of the Knesset (MK) Michael Kleiner of Likud, chairman of the Knesset Absorption Committee:

In my opinion, what will decide [the elections] is the emotional factor. So it's clear that one who thinks a Soviet Jew will vote for a party [such as Labor] which still sings the 'international' does not understand how important emotions are in an election campaign. In my opinion, [this] and not political questions [is] the factor which will determine the elections.... I believe that very few olim will vote for a party which still sings the "international" and still waves the red flag on the first of May.²⁰

Other reasons which may explain support of Likud include the fact that newcomers tend to be patriotic and have a basic dislike of the Arabs.²¹ In addition, Likud, which in the past often said there could be a large immigration of Jews to Israel, could now claim it was the party which knew the *olim* would come, expected their arrival and, as such, is deserving of their support.²² Furthermore, Likud believes that since the actual absorption process often takes place in development towns which are, generally speaking, Likud strongholds, part of the absorption process will include an adoption of right wing political attitudes similar to ones surrounding them in their immediate environment.²³ Likud also relies on the influence immigrant children will have in shaping their parent's political beliefs. Children generally are absorbed more quickly into Israeli life and newcomer children show right wing political tendencies.²⁴

Likud sees its hard line positions on questions of peace and security as an additional factor which will make the party appealing to the *olim*. Thus, Kleiner argues, "the decisive factor will be the fact that Russia is a large state. For people who are accustomed to such size it will be difficult to see how a state which is only 14 kilometers wide [could

continue to exist].... They have a basic understanding [of this] because geo-political arguments were often used in the USSR."²⁵

The 1991 Gulf War during which Israeli cities in the center of the country were struck by missiles seems to only strengthen this argument. Likud's Alex Glasman has argued:

*I think that during this year [1990] there was another thing that somehow shook all of Israeli society: the war. One of the most widely accepted myths, that a war is always "out there," but not in Tel Aviv, Haifa, or Jerusalem, broke. [Thus] I believe that the newcomers who were here during the war will turn to the right.*²⁶

Likud believes its status as largest right wing party will make it more attractive to the *olim* than smaller parties which hold similar positions on questions of peace and security. Glasman has argued:

*A smaller party, like Tehiya, Tzomet, or Moledet can indeed offer very attractive things. But we know that since they will not be the ruling party they will not be able to fulfill them ... on the other hand, if we offer something [the newcomer knows] we have to fulfill it.*²⁷

Despite these factors which seem to assure Likud's capability to gain immigrant support, the party realizes its capability to successfully absorb the newcomers will have a direct influence on its ability to gain votes. As Kleiner admitted, "Likud will be judged on its capability to absorb this *aliya*."²⁸ While during 1990, Likud seemed optimistic about its capability to efficiently absorb the *olim*, it became less confident during 1991. Alex Glasman, commenting on a recent interview by Arik Sharon on Israeli Television, stated: "Arik Sharon said a correct thing. It's true. We simply missed the first year. During the first year we simply ignored the clear signs which showed there will be an immigration."²⁹

Another problem facing Likud is its relative inactivity among the newcomers. Between 1990 and 1991, its activity did not increase and actually was somewhat reduced. While in 1990 Alex Glasman said that Likud engaged in "some" activity, including publication of a newspaper (closed in summer 1990 for lack of funds), tours to various

places in the country (including Judea and Samaria, i.e., the West Bank), and lectures and seminars, he said in 1991 that the party "was trying to do some things, but clearly not enough." He has admitted the development of an argument within the party on this question.³⁰ The little that is being done includes tours, parties, concerts, and meetings with Likud's political figures. In addition, the party distributes Russian-language translations of the writings of Jabotinsky and Begin, among others, to the *olim*. On the whole, however, Glasman admitted that Likud is doing "only very little of what is possible to do," and expressed his hope that as the elections approach this activity will increase.

As opposed to Likud, Labor seems to believe that factors relating to social and cultural background, reinforced by "rational" political thinking and Likud's ineffective absorption policies, will lead the *olim* to vote in its favor.³¹ According to this perspective, the characteristics of the newcomers are similar to those of the usual Labor voters in Israel. As a highly educated and cultured group, they will naturally tilt in the direction of Labor, which is the stronghold of "people of culture" in Israel.³² This attitude was expressed by Labor's Shimon Alon: "they [the newcomers] will have a hard time voting for Likud and to the right, for all sorts of reasons. Especially cultural reasons ... because people of culture are not to be found on that side."³³

Labor considers immigrants to be "pragmatic and sane" voters.³⁴ As such, they will not support what Labor considers to be Likud's "adventurist" positions on questions of peace and security.³⁵ As Uri Gordon notes, Labor believes that the *olim* wish for quiet, comfortable lives, and the only party to offer them that is Labor, which wants to bring about peace.³⁶ Finally, Labor believes it could gain voter support by default, as a result of Likud's absorption blunders. As Uri Gordon said in an interview in Tel Aviv, on 31 August 1990:

*Every newcomer suffers at first from absorption difficulties and loneliness. Who does he think is responsible for this? The state and the establishment ... Labor could perform its role as the speaker of the opposition in the next elections, and say [to the voter], "If I was in power this wouldn't have happened."*³⁷

Thus, Likud's failed absorption policies are interpreted by Labor as leading to its gain.

Similar to Likud, Labor did not pursue intensive activity among the newcomers during 1990. Unlike Likud, however, the party's officials tend to explain this inactivity by using ideological reasons. According to Labor's Shimon Alon, political activity among the newcomers, such as that undertaken by Likud "should be considered a crime," since the important issue at the moment should be the absorption of immigrants and not attempts to influence their political opinions.³⁸ Therefore, according to Alon, activities undertaken by bodies associated with the party such as the Histadrut or the Jewish Agency, are focusing on immigrant absorption but without attempting to give a political message.³⁹

Alon's comments must be understood in political context. He was willing to speak openly about few party activities. One such activity is a four-month long seminar aimed at introducing the newcomer to the basic history and functioning of the Jewish State. Alon explained such activities as fulfilling the need of immigrants in setting historical and religious roots for them to establish a feeling of belonging to the state and nation of Israel. Despite Alon's claims that this activity was apolitical, some of his unguarded statements indicated to the contrary. Alon spoke with an interviewer about a part of the lecture series dealing with the history and centrality of Jerusalem to the Jewish people's existence:

Alon: A lecture about Jerusalem and its history. Can you call that Labor party related?

Interviewer: No.

*Alon: Yes it is party related! Why not? Who freed Jerusalem? Name one general from Likud who did that!*⁴⁰

As Alon's comments demonstrate, Labor's activity among the Russian immigrants is meant to communicate, at least to some extent, a political message, despite its suggestion that it is a disinterested party.

Generally speaking, however, the feeling in Labor in the summer of 1990 was that it was still too early to discuss the political tendencies of the immigrants. In the summer of 1990, Labor thus was still an inactive party, attempting to overcome difficulties resulting from its own socialist essence.

Further left on the political spectrum, parties such as Shinui and Mapam greatly differ both in terms of ideology and in terms of their levels of activity among the newcomers. While both are indeed associated with the political left, particularly on issues of peace and security, they greatly differ in their views on economic issues.

Shinui, as a party arguing for a free market economy, believes it could win the Soviet vote since the *olim* tend to be opposed to a socialist economy.⁴¹ According to this party, Likud, which stands for economic principles similar to those of Shinui, has failed to destroy the old Labor socialist state and economic structures.⁴² The newcomer's experience in the Soviet Union, which turned them anti-socialist, will be a major factor in assuring their support for Shinui as the only hope for a real change in Israeli economy. Unlike Likud, which despite its control over the economy during most of the last 14 years had left the Israeli economy largely "Bolshevik" and unchanged, Shinui believes it has already proven the seriousness of its intentions. To demonstrate this fact, Shinui's Dov Hefetz had used the example of the privatization of Bezek, the Israeli Telephone Company, during the period in which Amnon Rubinstein served as communications minister. Shinui argues that this demonstrates Shinui stands behind its promises and does not only use them as propaganda.

Additional factors seen in Shinui as helping to gain the newcomers' votes include the party's call for a written constitution for Israel, its proposed change in the Israeli electoral system, its stand on citizens' rights issues, and its secular tilt. According to the party, immigrant past experiences in an oppressive dictatorial state will make them likely to support the call for a constitution for Israel as well as Shinui's stand on citizen rights. Their atheist background will also make them likely to adopt the party's position in questions relating to freedom of religion and worship.

Despite Shinui's belief in its capability to gain at least some of the *olim*'s support, it engages in little political activity among them. The party's activities up to June 1991 included publication of limited amounts of Russian-language materials and a major seminar attended by newcomers from various locations throughout the country. Several additional seminars were planned to take place later in the year. The goal of such meetings was to create a certain

basis for support among the newcomer, through which the party could reach an increasing number of people. Such activity, however, remains limited in scope, mostly due to lack of funds.

Similar to Shinui, Mapam views economic issues as central to future immigrant voting patterns. In contrast to the popular opinion that the *olim* will be somewhat reluctant to vote for a party which supports a state run economy, Mapam believes this will not stand in its way. As Mapam's Victor Blit stated:

I believe they don't know what socialism is, because they never really experienced it. But this is what they recognize as socialism ... It all depends on how you present the problem ... If I attempt to convince them that I am 100 percent correct, that the way is an equal socialist society, then I will be wasting my time. But if I explain to them that ... between totalitarian communism and wild capitalism there are some middle conditions, and that Israeli society ought not jump from the 1950s, when it was one of the world's most equal societies, to the complete injustice which exists today, I have more of a chance of convincing them, particularly when they will start understanding that there were some positive things in the USSR.... In my opinion, with time they will start understanding the true meaning of a Socialist Democracy. I wouldn't start with this point.... I don't think they are ready, due to the traumas they have experienced, to consider another socialist way.... But I believe that with time they will understand that between totalitarian Communism and wild Capitalism there are several middle-way conditions which may suit them better.⁴³

Mapam believes its dovish position on issues of peace and security is but another factor contributing to the party's attractiveness to newcomers. Nevertheless, the party emphasizes the need for an appropriate explanation of its position. According to Blit, starting with the point that the Palestinians deserve an independent state when talking to the *olim* is certainly inadvisable. It is much better to demonstrate to the newcomers that this issue is going to have direct bearing on their own well-being, particularly as relating to Israel's capability to receive more funds from the United States. Moreover, Mapam believes Soviet

immigrants, as people who lived in a very large country, will be more willing to accept the fact that a small piece of land which will be given to the Palestinians for the establishment of an independent state is meaningless to Israel's security, particularly in an age in which "missiles which can cross borders and land on Tel Aviv from Iraq."⁴⁴

Among all of Israel's parties, Mapam might be the most active among newcomers. According to Blit, the party has contacts with hundreds of *olim* every week, and with thousands every month. Party activities include weekend seminars usually held in Kibbutz Givat Haviva, in which 100-150 *olim* participated each week; workshops held in Mapam's various local branches; a Friday full-page publication presenting party positions in *Natshatrana*, one of the largest Russian-language newspapers in Israel which reaches 120,000 readers; absorption of the *olim* in various kibbutzim associated with the party, such as those of Hashomer Hatzair, in which they are exposed to ideological political activity for a period of six months; hosting *olim* during Jewish holidays, such as *Shavouot*, during which 2,500 immigrants visited the party's Kibbutzim; and helping in the establishment of the *Vaad Peulah Leyad Mapam* (Action Committee associated with Mapam), an independent soviet Jewish organization associated with the party. According to Blit these very intensive activities reach thousands of immigrants a month, and are aimed at communicating a very "rational" political message.⁴⁵

Among the small rightist parties there is also some activity aimed at reaching the newcomers, although on a more limited basis than that of Mapam. This activity remains limited, as the parties are aware of the various polls that predict a newcomer tilt to the right, a factor which possibly creates a sense of false confidence, especially in Tehiya and Moledet.

In Tehiya, the general feeling is that indeed the new voters will tend to support right wing parties, particularly on questions of peace and security. Tehiya's General Secretary, Dani Dayan, claimed that for an immigrant from a country as large as the Soviet Union, it is obvious that a state which is only 12 kilometers wide can not be a safe haven.⁴⁶

Despite the fact that Tehiya expects to win immigrant support on territorial issues, it is uncertain of their support due to the party's religious tilt. The party finds itself in a disadvantage on this

issue in comparison to other right wing secular parties, such as Tzomet. As Party General Secretary Dani Dayan said:

*One of the things which the newcomers oppose is ... a mixture between religion and state ... Tzomet has an advantage in the question of the party's platform in questions of religion. It is undoubtedly an advantage with the Soviet immigrants. We, of course, will not change for electoral reasons. But this is certainly a problem.*⁴⁷

Tehiya's activities among the newcomers exist on two different levels: the government through the party's members of the Knesset, and the movement. Tehiya's MK Geula Cohen deals with the issue as a member of the Knesset's *Aliya* and Absorption Committee headed by Arik Sharon. According to Dayan, despite the fact that her formal title is Deputy Science Minister, most of her activity focuses on absorption issues. Among such activities is the establishment of a new institution which trains people who directly absorb the *olim*. Tehiya's other MK, Yuval Neeman, is also directly involved in the process and at one point threatened to leave the government unless a budget for the absorption of 2,000 Soviet scientists is approved.

On the level of the movement, the party has established *ulpanim* in several of its branches across the country, and holds seminars, visits to Judea and Samaria, and lectures for the newcomers.⁴⁸ This activity, according to Dayan, is clearly political and not philanthropic in nature. The party also published several Russian language pamphlets and has been planning publication of a Russian-language newspaper.⁴⁹

Moledet believes 75 percent of the voters will tilt to the right.⁵⁰ The party believes it will win the support of newcomers because they would like to live in a secure and safe place, a result which Moledet believes its program offers.

Similar to Tehiya, Moledet's General Secretary Beni Ben-Tzur believes that the fact the immigrants come from a vast country will make them resist territorial compromises because they understand "that territory is important and one shouldn't give it up."⁵¹

The party's activity appears to be more sporadic and less organized than that of the others. Such activity includes a special Russian-speaking advisor

who answers immigrant telephone calls. Additionally, the party holds lectures in various places in the country. From the beginning of the recent wave of immigration until June 1991, four such lectures were held in Jerusalem, Petach Tikva, Ariel, and Kiryat Arba. Most of the party's activity focuses on publications in the Russian language, including position papers to explain party ideology, and a 16 page newspaper, subject to changes according to feedback from the party's Russian-speaking members.⁵²

The Political Ripeness of Soviet Jews

The political ripeness of the Russian immigrants is a question not yet given to a clear response. As newcomers from a country with a communist totalitarian heritage, they are not as yet fully accustomed to free and open political participation. In an interview on 28 August 1990, Alex Glasman of Likud said, "One has to remember where they come from. Many are still wary of full political identification." Additionally, due to their recent arrival in Israel, many are not yet fully aware of the structure of Israeli politics, the exact nature and programs of the various parties, or the main issues of political debate.⁵³ The majority of *olim* are more concerned with immediate personal problems, such as employment and housing, than with Israeli political questions.⁵⁴ This is well reflected by the fact that in a poll taken in October 1990, 66 percent of all people polled did not express a party preference.⁵⁵

This is not to say, however, that the *olim* lack interest or do not wish to participate in the next Israeli elections. According to a poll conducted by PORI in October 1990 in which 401 people were polled, 42.9 percent of the newcomers are very likely and 27.9 percent are somewhat likely to vote in the next Israeli elections.⁵⁶ This is about 10 percent less than the general turnout of Israeli citizens in national elections.

Subsequent data suggest the participation rate will increase to the usual Israeli level by the projected 1992 election. It is interesting to note that while immigrants seem noncommittal on questions relating to party identification and leadership, they have a clear right wing orientation when it comes to policy questions relating to peace and security. In an October 1990 poll, the majority of the immigrants (55 percent) said that Israel should retain all the

West Bank and Gaza "even if it means final peace agreement may not be reached." In the same poll, 85 percent said population transfer of all Arabs from Israel and the territories which will make Israel a purely Jewish state was desirable, although 61 percent found it impossible.⁵⁷ Similar opinions were expressed in the June 1991 *Reshet Yediot Tikshoret* poll, where 45 percent were either for enforcement of Israeli law or population transfer as a preferred solution to the Arab-Israeli problem.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, only 58.8 percent among the people who would like to keep the territories were also willing to go to war over them.⁵⁹ Thus, one can talk about a developing political awareness among the newcomers, but not one which is fully developed.

The role newcomers will play in the 1992 Knesset elections is a matter of interest to all political parties in Israel. At the center of this interest is the political deadlock which has characterized Israel's political map in recent years. As a large group (most of which is within voting age), newcomers hold the potential to break this stalemate, thus creating a change in Israeli political life.

The parties, although generally agreeing that immigration will introduce an important change in Israeli political life, tend to disagree as to the essence of this change.⁶⁰ While some, and especially the larger parties, expected the political map to more decisively tilt in one direction or the other,⁶¹ other parties, especially Shinui, expected it to change into a more centripetal, center-seeking system.⁶² Moreover, while most parties agreed that the change will be political, others, and particularly Shimon Alon of Labor, expected it to be a cultural-social change.⁶³

An altogether different opinion was expressed by Dr. Yuri Stern, a Soviet-Jewish activist who was among the founders of the "Information Center for Soviet Jewry" and the "Zionist Forum." Stern believes the change immigration will introduce into Israeli political life will be a "normalization" of Israeli politics by focusing it on internal rather than external questions.⁶⁴ This will result from the fact that immigrants, as a group seeking employment and housing, will naturally focus on economic and social questions, unlike most Israeli voters, who according to Stern, are mostly concerned with foreign policy issues. Thus, the divide between the Israeli political left and right will not center on questions relating mostly to the Arab-Israeli

conflict, but rather will begin to center on the parties' economic and social platforms.⁶⁵ The result will be election campaigns more similar to those in the United States and Europe. Stern argues that this will normalize what until now had been an abnormal political system.

Another interesting possibility is reflected in growing thoughts about unification among the smaller parties on both the left and the right of the political spectrum. This perceived need to consider unification results from the fact that as more immigrants arrive, and the Israeli population grows, a Knesset mandate will require more votes. For each of the smaller parties, this means that in order to maintain a power base, they will need to appeal to a larger number of voters. Such concerns were well expressed by Victor Blit of Mapam:

*We are talking about very large numbers [of immigrants]. So much so that ... one mandate to the Knesset could "cost" about 25,000 votes. For a party like Mapam, to maintain the same three MKs we now have [would] mean to get [a minimum of] 75,000 votes, when in the past we could have achieved them with 54,000.*⁶⁶

On the political left, there have been signs of unification since the summer of 1990. There is an actual, although informal, unification of three of the left of center parties: Ratz (five mandates), Mapam (three mandates) and Shinui (two mandates). The talk of unification began at a meeting of all ten MKs held in the Knesset in which they decided to act as a unified parliamentary bloc in order to set the stage for full unification. They also agreed that the unified list would be led by Shulamit Aloni of Ratz.⁶⁷ While there are no major differences among these parties on peace related issues, the biggest obstacles to unification are in their difference on economic issues.⁶⁸ Only when each of the parties meets to discuss and ratify the proposed unification⁶⁹ will the full strength of the resistance to such a move become known. While there is no clear evidence that the creation of the leftist political bloc (referred to as the "peace bloc") is a direct result of the Soviet immigration, the impact of the immigrant vote clearly was a factor taken into account when the decision was made to attempt such a unification.

Signs of unification are less evident on the political right. Because the political right, according to most

polls and political figures, will benefit most from the Soviet Jewish immigration, the right wing parties seem confident in their capability to maintain their previous level of support, and perhaps even to increase it.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, when the General Secretary of Tehiya was asked what his party has to offer to the newcomers not already being offered by the other right of center parties (such as Moledet or Tzomet) competing for the same block of voters, he noted: "First, until the elections there could be developments and all sorts of unifications ... this is certainly a possibility."⁷¹ One has to note, however, that this comment is the only evidence given by any of the right wing parties to such a possibility.

One can argue that while the current political ripeness of the Soviet immigrants is not fully determined, it seems as if they are rapidly acclimating to Israel's political reality. Being increasingly aware of the main political issues, and demonstrating strong willingness to participate in the democratic process, there is little doubt immigrants will have a say in the next Knesset elections. As opinions on various internal and foreign policy political issues crystalize, they will gradually develop identifications with political parties, which will strengthen the impact immigrants will have on Israel's political life. While the results of this impact are not fully known, they do have the potential to bring about some change in the structure and main issues of Israel's political map.

A Russian Political Party?

One of the more interesting questions is whether Soviet immigrants will establish their own political party. While during the summer of 1990 it was still somewhat unclear whether there would be an independent Russian list in the next Knesset election, as time progresses, such a possibility is gradually turning into a reality.⁷² Several polls have already demonstrated the high level of support such a party could gain among immigrants. Among them is the June 1991 *Reshet Yediot Tikshoret* poll which claims 68 percent of the *olim* will support a Soviet party.⁷³ This claim is strengthened by the fact that in the same poll, 60 percent of the 575 people polled said they will not vote for any Israeli party among the 11 mentioned in the questionnaire.⁷⁴

These results evidently did not escape the attention of most of Israel's political parties. When asked

about the possibility of the organization of an independent immigrant party (during the summer of 1991), most Israeli party representatives said several such organizations already existed, and that they would certainly take part in the 1992 Knesset elections. Alex Glasman of Likud said: "as far as I know two such parties running on this issue ... [that] can be called 'Russian Parties,' already exist today.

And there are some who say that the Zionist Forum, headed by Nathan Sharansky, will also run."⁷⁵ In Tehiya, General Secretary Dani Dayan said:

*Investigations we conducted show that the Russian parties have a reasonable chance [to gain seats in the next Knesset]. Therefore, the part that will be left for the "Israeli" parties will probably be no more than 70 percent of the [votes of the] newcomers ... there can certainly be a situation in which the Russian parties may receive about a quarter of the newcomers votes ... There are attempts [for organizing Russian Parties] ... there are especially two [such organizations] that are active in terms of public relations and the media. One is a body that calls itself TZAAD (acronym for Zionism, Immigration, Democracy). The other one I think is called Am Ehad if I'm not mistaken ... We estimate that toward the time of elections several such bodies will decide to compete. We think that it is safe to assume that there will be three or four Russian lists that will take part in the elections.*⁷⁶

Similar views were expressed by both Shinui and Mapam, on the left end of the political spectrum. Dov Hefetz of Shinui said that the organization of such political bodies was "certainly possible" and admitted he knew of several such attempts.⁷⁷ Mapam's Victor Blit said the *olim* are "certainly considering" the establishment of such parties and that such things "definitely stand on their agenda."⁷⁸

Among the possible bodies that could organize into a political party, Ran Adelist, writing for *Bamakom*,⁷⁹ mentions the "Zionist Forum," Sharansky's organization, which is the largest and most active body among the Russian immigrants;⁸⁰ the "association of Soviet immigrants"⁸¹ headed by Robert Golan, which is identified with Labor; Am Ehad; and finally a new organization, headed by Yosef Horol, which is known to be affiliated with Likud.⁸²

The success of a new political Russian immigrants list will depend to a large extent on the personalities leading it. According to most polls, the most popular man among newcomers is Nathan Sharansky. A PORI poll conducted in October 1990 suggests almost 45 percent of the Soviet voters find him either very or somewhat favorable.⁸³ A later poll, conducted in July 1991, claims over 60 percent of all immigrants supporting the establishment of an independent Russian *olim* party support Sharansky as the most popular personality.⁸⁴

This is not to say, however, that there is no opposition to Sharansky among the immigrants. Heading this opposition is a body called "Organization of the Prisoners of Zion,"⁸⁵ headed by Yehezkel Polarovitch. According to this organization, Sharansky was one of the human rights fighters in the Soviet Union, who only later adopted Zionism as a means for getting out of jail.⁸⁶ Polarovitch often refers to Sharansky's struggle for open Russian-Jewish emigration to any destination in the world, which according to Polarovitch's organization should have been restricted to Israel.⁸⁷

Some of the opposition of the Organization of the Prisoners of Zion must have found its way to the party center in Moledet and to some Likud MKs, particularly Michael Kleiner. General Secretary of Moledet, Mr. Beni Ben-Tzur, said in an interview held in late June 1991:

*I see Russians to whom you mention Sharansky, and they say, "No, No, No" ... they consider him a parasite. They claim ... he was in jail, [but] many of them lived in similar conditions. Generally speaking living there was [difficult], but he managed to transform it into personal capital.*⁸⁸

MK Michael Kleiner, during a September 1990 interview said, "This man [Sharansky] is a crook, who only used the Jewish cause. He was actually Sakharov's squire, a fighter for human rights ... but what's disturbing is not that he fought for human rights but rather that he jumped on the Zionist cause only when he understood it could get him out of jail."⁸⁹

During 1991, Kleiner made similar public remarks and was reprimanded by Defense Minister Arens, Binyamin (Bibi) Netanyahu and Uzi Landau.⁹⁰ This reprimand demonstrated the level to which Likud considers Sharansky to be a political asset.

Sharansky is unwilling to commit himself fully to the political race. Refusing to be identified with either side of the political spectrum, he denies rumors he will head an independent *olim* party in the near future. The parties, although continuously attempting to gain his support, gradually are understanding that he would like to maintain his image as a national hero, and thus may choose to avoid politics altogether. When asked to comment, Tehiya's Dani Dayan said: "At the moment it seems that Sharansky himself does not intend to run. That doesn't mean that there couldn't be people close to Sharanski who ... enjoy his backing, and they could be the ones leading the list."⁹¹ Similar views were expressed by Mapam's Victor Blit:

*Sharansky ... I don't believe this will be his choice [i.e., running as a leader of an independent list] since he is going to receive such tempting proposals from both large parties that he will have to decide whether to gamble [politically] on his own, or to receive a secure place in one of the two largest parties. I believe each will promise him a good deal just in order to be able to say "Sharansky is ours."*⁹²

This opinion was also shared by Shinui's Dov Hefetz who said: "I don't believe he will [head an independent *olim* party]. He claims he will not ... I think he already knows the system well enough that he will not want to 'burn' himself if such an attempt fails."⁹³

If Sharansky indeed chooses to stay out of politics, the question to ask is who would emerge as leaders of a Soviet immigrant political movement. Polls show other possible leaders, (Ida Nudel, Edward Koznitzov, Yasha Kazkov, or Pima Paybloom), do not enjoy a wide base of support among the immigrants.⁹⁴ This question, therefore, still remains to be answered. It seems very likely that at least one, if not several, Soviet immigrant lists will take part in the 1992 Knesset elections, but it is not yet fully clear in what political direction they could tilt. Nevertheless, there seem to be active attempts from both Likud and Labor to have such parties affiliated with them or at least tilt in their directions.

The success of such movements in the next elections cannot be predicted, since it seems the man most capable of inspiring the new Russian voters (Sharansky) has not yet chosen to risk his special standing in Israeli society by entering political life.

Although all key Soviet Jewish figures have denied the potential of such a development, rumors have persisted, denials have been viewed with skepticism, and other (non-Soviet) political figures and observers seem to view the idea as a relative certainty. Such a party could develop in a number of ways, but the two basic alternatives seem to be a party with Sharansky as the central figure or one without him. Although he seems to be the centerpiece of highly visible Soviet Jewish activities and a focus of media attention, he is increasingly viewed in and out of the Soviet Jewish community and other political circles as something of an opportunist. Some Soviet Jews see him as a "professional" Soviet Jew, using his celebrity status to attract attention, earn substantial sums of money, and spend large blocks of time outside of Israel. Many politicians, especially on the right of center (particularly in Likud), find his disclaimers of political ambition not particularly credible and see a Soviet-oriented political party as a distinct possibility in the 1992 election.

Would such a party prove successful and develop staying power? Although it is premature to determine the longevity of a nonexistent party, the overriding consensus is that should such a party emerge, it will most likely follow the same general path of and suffer the same fate of early ethnic parties of the 1950s (the Yemenite Party).

Right, Left, or Center?

A central question is whether the right (primarily, but not exclusively, Likud), the left (essentially Labor), or others will benefit from the voting

potential and power of the new immigrants. An interesting perspective is that despite all the factors, in the final analysis, the left will gain some support as the party "out of power" and will therefore be able to capitalize on failures of Likud. On the other hand, there will be the "natural" tendency of the former communist subjects to turn away from socialism to the right, and their tendency in this direction will be influenced by the fact that they have been gotten out of the Soviet Union and to Israel by Likud. But, when all is said and done, it may well be that voters will divide along the entire political spectrum with a small advantage to the right of center (even if not all to Likud).

Elections 1992: The Effect of Soviet Immigrants

In the final analysis, the effect of Soviet Jews will be apparent in the 1992 Knesset election. Tables 5 and 6 suggest alternative results.

Following that are five scenarios estimating the impact of the new immigrants on the 1992 elections. Scenario One is a Labor-favorable outcome, which seems improbable. Scenario Two takes into consideration the formation of an "immigrant party." The third foresees reinforcement of the *status quo* and distribution of Soviet Jewish votes parallel to the 1988 distribution. The fourth is based on a late 1990 PORI poll which gives the impression that the new immigrants will vote in the percentages indicated. Scenario Five is based on the estimates of voting patterns suggested by party officials and senior political figures. It appears to be the most probable based on available evidence to date.

The views contained in this document are those of the authors and should not be interpreted as necessarily representing the official policy, either expressed or implied, of the Defense Intelligence College, the Department of Defense, or the US Government.

Table 5: 1988 Election			
Party	Votes	Percent of Votes	Seats
Likud	709,305	31.1	40
Labor (Maarach-Alignment)	685,363	30.0	39
SHAS	107,709	4.7	6
Agudat Israel	102,714	4.5	5
RATZ (CRM)	97,513	4.3	5
MAFDAL (NRP)	89,720	3.9	5
HADASH (DFPE)	84,032	3.7	4
Tehiya	70,730	3.1	3
MAPAM	56,345	2.5	3
Tzomet	45,489	2.0	2
Moledet	44,174	1.9	2
Center-Shinui	39,538	1.0	2
Degel HaTorah	34,279	1.5	2
PLP	33,695	1.5	1
Arab Democratic List	27,012	1.2	1
Total Population		4,300,000	
Registered Voters (Percentage)		68	
Registered Voters		2,918,439	
Total Ballots Cast		2,305,567	
Percentage Turnout		79	
Invalid Ballots		22,444	
Total Valid Votes		2,283,123	
One Percent Threshold		22,831	
Votes for Parties under One Percent		55,505	
Votes Needed for a Mandate		18,563	

Table 6: 1992 Election (Estimated)	
Probable population	5,200,000
Estimated Registered Voters (68 percent)	3,536,000
Estimated Percentage Turnout	80
Estimated Ballots Cast (Including Soviet Jews)	2,828,800
Estimated Invalid Ballots (.0097346)	27,537
Estimated Votes for Parties Under One Percent (.0240742)	68,101
Estimated Threshold (One Percent)	28,012
Votes Needed for a Mandate	22,728
Russians	
Estimated Soviet Immigration Between 1988 and 1992	434,867
1988	2,250
1989	12,814
1990	184,803
1991 (Estimated)	150,000
1992 (Six Month Estimate)	85,000
Estimated New Voters Between 1988 and 1990	300,000
Percent Turnout	80
Soviet Votes	240,000
Potential Mandates Affected by the Vote	11 (10.5)

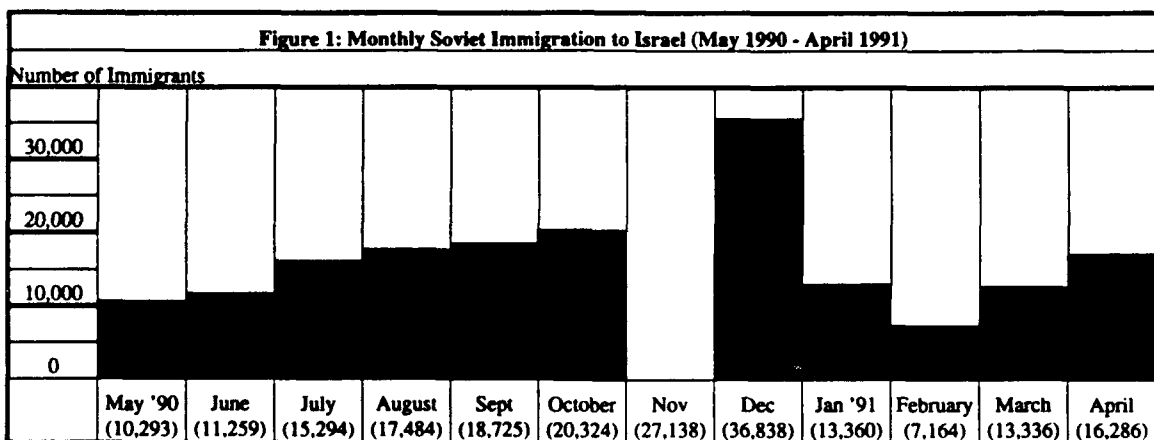
Scenario One: 1992 Knesset Election				
Turnout	2,838,800		Including Soviet Vote of	240,000
Division of Soviet Vote				
Labor: 60 %	Likud: 10 %	Moledet: 5 %	Tsomet: 5 %	Tehiya: 20 %
Party	1988 Percent	1992 Votes	Soviet Contribution	Seats
Likud	31.10	805,117	24,000	36
Labor	30.00	776,640	144,000	40
Tehiya	3.10	80,253	48,000	6
Moledet	1.90	49,187	12,000	2
Tsomet	2.00	51,776	12,000	3
Religious Bloc	14.60	377,965	0	17
Left Bloc	14.20	367,610	0	16

Scenario Two: 1992 Knesset Election				
Turnout	2,828,800		Including Soviet Vote of	240,000
Division of Soviet Vote				
Likud: 25 %		Labor: 10 %		Russian Party: 65 %
Party	1988 Percent	1992 Votes	Soviet Contribution	Seats
Likud	31.10	805,117	60,000	38
Labor	30.00	776,640	24,000	35
Tehiya	3.10	80,253		3
Moledet	1.90	49,187		2
Tsomet	2.00	51,776		2
Religious Bloc	14.60	377,965		17
Left Bloc	14.20	367,610		16
Russian Party			156,000	7

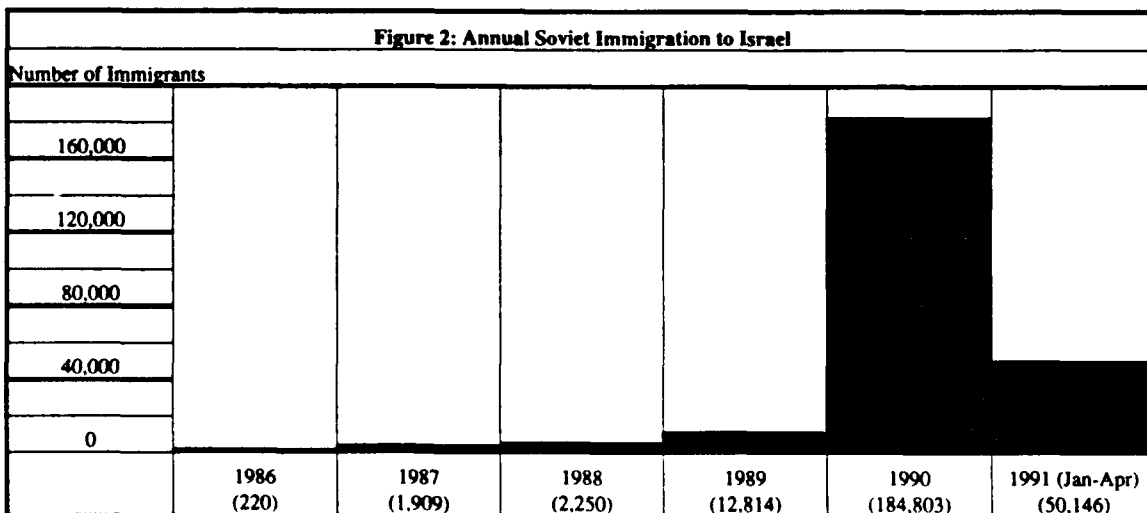
Scenario Three: 1992 Knesset Election				
Turnout	2,828,800		Including Soviet Vote of	240,000
Division of Soviet Vote				
Reinforcement of the Status Quo				
Party	1988 Percent	1992 Votes	Soviet Contribution	Seats
Likud	31.10	805,117	74,640	39
Labor	30.00	776,640	72,000	37
Tehiya	3.10	80,253	7,440	4
Moledet	1.90	49,187	4,560	2
Tsomet	2.00	51,776	4,800	2
Religious Bloc	14.60	377,965	35,040	18
Left Bloc	14.20	367,610	34,080	18

Scenario Four: 1992 Knesset Election				
Turnout	2,828,800		Including Soviet Vote of	240,000
Division of Soviet Vote				
Likud: 65 %	Labor: 23 %		Right: 9 %	Religious: 3 %
Party	1988 Percent	1992 Votes	Soviet Contribution	Seats
Likud	31.10	805,117	156,000	42
Labor	30.00	776,640	55,200	37
Tehiya	3.10	80,253	7,200	4
Moledet	1.90	49,187	7,200	2
Tsomet	2.00	51,776	7,200	2
Religious Bloc	14.60	377,965	7,200	17
Left Bloc	14.20	367,610	0	16

Scenario Five: 1992 Knesset Election				
Turnout	2,828,800		Including Soviet Vote of	240,00
Division of Soviet Vote				
Likud: 30 %	Labor: 15 %	Moledet: 15 %	Tehiya: 15 %	Tsomet: 15 %
	Religious: 5 %		Russian: 5 %	
Party	1988 Percent	1992 Votes	Soviet Contribution	Seats
Likud	31.10	805,117	72,000	38
Labor	30.00	776,640	36,000	36
Tehiya	3.10	80,253	36,000	5
Moledet	1.90	49,187	36,000	4
Tsomet	2.00	51,776	36,000	4
Religious Bloc	14.60	377,965	12,000	17
Left Bloc	14.20	367,610		16
Russian Party			12,000	0



Prepared by National UJA. Data from the Jewish Agency for Israel.



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Table 7: Jewish Emigration From the USSR			
Year	Total Jewish Emigres	Number to Israel	Percent to Israel
1968-1970	4,235	4,207	99.3
1971	13,022	12,819	98.4
1972	31,681	31,652	99.9
1973	34,733	33,477	96.3
1974	20,628	16,816	81.5
1975	13,221	8,531	64.5
1976	14,261	7,279	51.0
1977	16,736	8,348	49.8
1978	28,864	12,192	42.2
1979	51,320	17,614	34.3
1980	21,471	7,570	35.2
1981	9,447	1,767	18.7
1982	2,688	737	27.4
1983	1,314	387	29.4
1984	896	340	37.9
1985	1,140	348	30.5
1986	914	206	22.5
1987	8,155	2,072	25.4
1988	18,965	2,166	11.4
1989	71,196	12,122	17.0
1990	186,815	181,759	97.3
Month	1989 Soviet Jews to Israel	1990 Soviet Jews to Israel	1991 Soviet Jews to Israel
January	205	4,591	13,360
February	308	5,746	7,164
March	462	7,380	13,336
April	516	10,641	16,286
May	549	10,202	16,048
June	508	11,015	20,473
July	648	15,395	10,325
August	793	17,484	
September	1,042	18,725	
October	1,565	20,324	
November	1,936	25,186	
December	3,590	35,070	
Total	12,122	181,759	

Source: National Conference on Soviet Jewry.

Endnotes

A note on sources and research methods: The English language literature on the subject of this study is extremely limited, although there is more in Russian and even more in Hebrew. The team participating in the project utilized all the printed materials available in English, Hebrew, and Russian.

The research team is indebted to the DARSP support which facilitated acquisition of the printed materials, conducting interviews in Washington, analysis of the research materials, and writing the report.

In addition, the study benefitted from research performed by the principal authors during various trips abroad over the past 18 months. In the course of doctoral dissertation research during long sojourns in Israel in the summers of 1990 and 1991 which included substantial interviewing, Meyrav Wurmser was able to pursue some of the themes central to this study. Bernard Reich similarly was able to conduct interviews essential to the subject matter of the study during two visits to the Soviet Union (in the spring of 1990 and of 1991) at the invitation of the USSR Academy of Sciences, and during a research trip to Israel in the winter of 1990-1991 in connection with an American Specialist Grant from USIA.

¹In *The Jewish State (Der Judenstaat)* first published in Vienna in February 1896, Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern political Zionism, defined the Jewish question in rather stark terms: "No one can deny the gravity of the situation of the Jews. Wherever they live in perceptible numbers, they are more or less persecuted ... The nations in whose midst Jews live are all either covertly or openly Anti-Semitic."

Herzl's solution to the problem: "The whole plan is in its essence perfectly simple.... Let the sovereignty be granted us over a portion of the globe large enough to satisfy the rightful requirements of a nation; the rest we shall manage for ourselves." In this view, Jews would eventually come to the Jewish state as a solution to their problems and the problem of anti-Semitism would thus be resolved.

²Israel's 14 May 1948 Declaration of Independence stressed, "The State of Israel will be open to the immigration of Jews from all countries of their dispersion...." Later, in the Law of Return (July 1950), Israel declared: "Every Jew has the right to immigrate to the country."

³Much of this has been studied and documented for the waves of immigrants prior to the current group of Soviet Jews.

⁴In some respects, this is akin to trying to hit a moving target, given the rapid pace of recent developments. Nevertheless, some patterns and trends are clear, and they form the base for this analysis.

⁵In general, the Arab states have opposed Soviet policy allowing Jews to emigrate to Israel, arguing in part that they would displace Palestinian Arabs in the occupied territories. A short summary of the Arab view is contained in "Soviet Jewish Immigration," *Palestine Perspectives* (September-October 1990): 6-7. The core of the position is articulated as follows: "Operating from the Zionist ideological premise that anti-Semitism is a universal and incurable Gentile disease, Israel made the 'ingathering' of the Jews of the world its primary mission. It also had practical reasons for the ingathering of the Jews. Large numbers of Jewish immigrants were needed to further marginalize the remaining Arab residents of Palestine, to help Israel overcome its manpower inferiority vis-à-vis the Arab world, and since the substantial Jewish communities in the world live in Europe and North America, new immigrants were needed

to enhance the proportion of European (as against non-European) Jews in Israel. Israel not only worked to bring about an influx of Soviet Jewish immigrants, it also worked hard to make sure that they have no place to go but to Israel. In the past, the overwhelming majority of Soviet Jews who were permitted to leave their country chose to go elsewhere.... The Arabs became apprehensive. Massive Jewish immigration to Israel threatened to make the expulsion of the remnants of Palestinian society a clear and present danger. Talk of 'transfer,' (meaning mass eviction of Palestinians) increased in Israel. The government of Israel continued to refuse to commit itself to keeping the new immigrants out of occupied Palestine. Even if new immigrants do not settle in the occupied territories in large numbers, there is the possibility that the Israelis they are displacing would succumb to the temptation of subsidized housing in Jewish settlements there and become settlers themselves. Jordan felt threatened, because it feared that the expulsion of Palestinians from the occupied West Bank and Gaza would further destabilize it by creating new demographic and economic problems for it. The possibility of another spurt of Israeli territorial expansion at the expense of neighboring Arab states disturbed the Arab world as a whole." The Arab view of the impact of massive Soviet immigration on the Arab-Israeli conflict is considered in more detail in Geoffrey Aronson, "Soviet Jewish Emigration, the United States and the Occupied Territories," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 19 (Summer 1990): 30-45; and Joost R. Hiltermann, "Settling for War: Soviet Immigration and Israel's Settlement Policy in East Jerusalem," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 20 (Winter 1991): 71-85.

⁶Journalistic extrapolation from limited interviews, for example led to a headline in the *Wall Street Journal* which stated, "Flood of Soviet Jews to Israel Could Beget Big Changes in Nation." The subheading noted, "Newcomers Bring New Skills and a Nationalist Outlook That Bolsters Right Wing." The basis for these broad, important, and probably reasonably accurate conclusions apparently were interviews with several Soviet immigrants. Clearly these conclusions and assertions deserve careful examination since they have important implications for Israeli and Middle Eastern politics and for United States policy.

⁷One estimate includes the following calculation: "The potential number of emigrants from the Soviet Union eligible to enter Israel under the Law of Return can be estimated as follows: those who identified themselves as Jews in the 1988 population census of the Soviet Union (1,370,000 to 1,400,000 people); Jews not identifying themselves as such, and the offspring of intermarriages, where one grandparent is Jewish (1,500,000 to 2,000,000 people); their non-Jewish relatives (500,000 to 600,000 people). The total number thus comes to about 3.5 million. Assuming that half of these people are preparing to emigrate, we arrive at 1.75 million potential immigrants. To this number one should add 20 percent of non-Jews who will obtain forged documents to prove their ostensible Jewishness. This gives us an estimate of 2 million potential immigrants, and this is a conservative estimate." Efim Levitch and Alexander Livin, "Who are the Russian Immigrants?" *Israeli Democracy* (Fall 1990): 13. This estimate is probably overstated.

⁸Quoted in *The Washington Post*, 30 December 1990, 1.

⁹*Jerusalem Post*, 23 December 1990, 1. "Some 7,000 immigrants arrived between Thursday night and early this morning, at a rate of about 100 an hour."

¹⁰*Jerusalem Post*, 23 December 1990, editorial.

¹¹The *Jerusalem Post* argued that: "The country must be mobilized as if it were preparing for a major war.... Plans must

be devised with the participation of all appropriate institutions. There is an almost universal consensus on the historic importance of this *aliya*. On this issue there should be no differences between Left and Right, government and opposition. All sectors and all factions must share in the effort and assure the nation that the burden will be borne equitably by all. Israel can expect neither world Jewry nor other governments to help in this momentous task unless it itself revolutionizes its attitude to the endeavor and displays unity, resolve and the willingness to make sacrifices." *Jerusalem Post*, 23 December 1990, editorial. Overwhelmingly, Israelis agreed as demonstrated by their actions and despite their complaints.

¹²In the short term, the costs of Soviet immigration to Israel are high in both fiscal and broader social terms. Over time (and perhaps a rather short period of time), Israel is likely to realize that the immigration is a boon in the shape of human resources. These are immigrants of "high quality." Their educational level, work experience, professional status, and participation in the work force is higher than that of Israeli system. Many are of working age and prepared to undergo retraining and professional reeducation to integrate themselves into the Israeli economy.

¹³*Jerusalem Post*, 23 December 1990.

¹⁴*Jerusalem Post*, 23 December 1990.

¹⁵PORI administered a personal interview survey during October 1990 among a representative sample of 401 Soviet Jewish heads of household newly arrived in Israel.

¹⁶Quoted in *The Jerusalem Report*, 8.

¹⁷Baruch Mevorach, "Hearchut Hamiflagot Leklitat Haaliya MeBrit Hamoatzot" ("Parties' preparations for Soviet immigration absorption"), *Minhalim*, October 1990, 38.

¹⁸This assessment was made by Alex Glasman of Likud in an interview in Tel Aviv on 30 June 1990.

¹⁹*Minhalim*, October 1990, 41.

²⁰Michael Kleiner, MK, Likud, interview, Tel Aviv, 4 September 1990.

²¹Uri Gordon, Chairman of Absorption Department of the Jewish Agency, interview in Tel Aviv, 31 August 1990. Gordon explained immigrant dislike of the Arabs derives from their past dislike of the Asiatic nationals in the USSR. The general feeling of hostility, according to Gordon, results from the similarity immigrants see between Arabs and the Soviet Asiatics (i.e., Muslims in the Soviet Union).

²²*Bamakom*, 28 June 1991.

²³Gordon interview, 31 August 31, 1990.

²⁴Gordon interview, 31 August 31, 1990. See also *Bamakom*, 28 June 1991.

²⁵Kleiner interview, 4 September 1990.

²⁶Glasman interview, 30 June 1991.

²⁷Glasman interview, 30 June 1991.

²⁸Kleiner interview, 4 September 1991.

²⁹Glasman interview, 30 June 1991.

³⁰Glasman interview, 30 June 1991.

³¹Shimon Alon, Labor, interview in Tel Aviv, 28 August 1990; and Gordon interview, 31 August 1990.

³²Alon interview, 28 August 1990; and Gordon interview, 31 August 1990.

³³Alon interview, 28 August 1990.

³⁴Alon interview, 28 August 1990.

³⁵Alon interview, 28 August 1990. See also *Bamakom*, 28 June 1991.

³⁶Gordon interview, 31 August 1990.

³⁷Gordon interview, 31 August 1990.

³⁸Alon interview, 28 August 1990.

³⁹Alon interview, 28 August 1990.

⁴⁰Alon interview, 28 August 1990.

⁴¹Dov Hefetz, Shinui, interview in Tel Aviv, 20 June 1991.

⁴²Hefetz said, "Likud's problem relating to issues of free market economy is ... that it controls such matters and yet it maintains a Bolshevik market.... It has the opportunity [to change things] and yet it doesn't do it."

⁴³Victor Blit, Mapam, interview in Tel Aviv, 27 June 1991.

⁴⁴Blit interview, 27 June 1991.

⁴⁵Blit interview, 27 June 1991.

⁴⁶Dani Dayan, General Secretary of Tehiya, interview in Tel Aviv, 27 June 1991.

⁴⁷Dayan interview, 27 June 1991.

⁴⁸Dayan interview, 27 June 1991.

⁴⁹Dayan interview, 27 June 1991.

⁵⁰Beni Ben-Tzur, General Secretary of Moledet, interview in Tel Aviv, 26 June 1991.

⁵¹Ben-Tzur interview, 26 June 1991.

⁵²Ben-Tzur interview, 26 June 1991.

⁵³Gordon interview, August 31, 1990. "One has to understand several important psychological factors [about the *olim*]. This is a population which is unaware of the Yom Kippur blunder. It is a group of people who do not remember, understand, and know the Lebanon War, and this is also a population which wasn't present in Israel during the political turnover when [Prime Minister Menachem] Begin came to power. In other words, they don't know Begin. They also don't hate Begin. I will tell you something else: I'm sure that what's true for Begin is also true for [Shimon] Peres. They don't know Peres in depth ... most of them are clean of prejudice and all they ask for as immigrants [is] to improve their economic condition and be absorbed in a new state".

⁵⁴In a poll conducted by *Reshet Yediot Tikshoret* in June 1991, 56 percent of the people polled said that employment is their most pressing problem. Only 10-15 percent claimed that political questions, such as Arab-Israeli relations, were of the highest importance to them. The poll was published in *Bamakom* (the Rishon LeZion, Rehovot, Nes-Ziona and vicinity weekly), Friday, 28 June 1991.

⁵⁵United States Information Agency (USIA), "Recent Soviet Jewish immigration to Israel: Hawkish on Issues, Noncommittal on Parties and Leadership," *Research Memorandum*, 6 March 1991.

⁵⁶PORI Poll, "Soviet Jewish immigrant survey: October 1991".

⁵⁷USIA, *Research Memorandum*, 6 March 1991.

⁵⁸*Bamakom*, 28 June 1991.

⁵⁹*Bamakom*, 28 June 1991.

⁶⁰The only party which seems to argue that immigration will not introduce important changes in the Israeli political map was Mapam. In an interview on 28 June 1991 Victor Blit said: "I'm very doubtful if this thing [the immigration] will create an essential change. I see that the division of votes is not seriously different... In my opinion, Likud will 'succeed' in creating a catastrophe in absorption, but we can already see the tip of the iceberg now. There is no housing and no employment ... and that's going to decide things to a large extent".

⁶¹In an interview in Tel Aviv on 30 June 1991, Alex Glasman of Likud said: "[a change in the Israeli political map] could happen. I'm not sure it will happen in the coming elections, although that is also a possibility... At any rate, I believe that after these elections there will not be a situation, like today, when there

is an unclear stalemate, with the opportunity for a [political] blackmail."

Similar comments were made by Dani Dayan, General Secretary of Tehiya, in an interview in Tel Aviv, on 27 June 1991: "In Israel, a very small change is a real change... In a situation in which there exists a political stalemate between the two blocks, left and right, and there is a third bloc, the religious, which is the power broker, then even a small change is important... Thus, I estimate that there will be a change, small but meaningful, i.e., relatively small [in terms of numbers], but meaningful in terms of the result: a rise in the power of the right at the expense of the left and the religious parties. Therefore, in our opinion, yes, there will be a change".

⁶²In an interview in Tel Aviv, on 20 June 1991, Dov Hefetz of Shinui said: "I believe they will [change the Israeli political map].... It seems to me that the longer they [the *olim*] are in Israel, the more they learn about the nuances of things.... It stops being black and white and they became more moderate in their views. They move to the center, more or less, as time passes. This is how I identify it".

⁶³In an interview in Tel Aviv on 28 August 1990, Shimon Alon of Labor said: "They will change the cultural and social [spheres], and then the Israeli society will necessarily change; not in the immediate range, not within two years, but within six to ten years, it can change as a result [of the immigration]".

⁶⁴In an interview in Tel Aviv on 29 August 1990, Stern said: "This is the first time that there will be an [Israeli] voter for whom the question of the territories does not really matter. He will cause Israeli politics to go back to a certain normalcy ... the parties will go back to competing in matters that really matter to each citizen ... there is an opportunity here for new Israeli politics."

⁶⁵Stern interview, 29 August 1990.

⁶⁶Blit interview, 27 June 1991.

⁶⁷"The left is unifying without Weizman," *Maariv*, 16 August 1991.

⁶⁸Shinui is a firm believer in free market competition while Mapam holds strongly leftist, socialist opinions.

⁶⁹Ratz and Shinui were to decide in October 1991, while Mapam was to will bring it before membership in January 1992.

⁷⁰See for example the PORI October 1990 Survey and USIA's *Research Memorandum* of 6 March 1991.

⁷¹Dayan interview, 27 June 1991.

⁷²During the summer of 1990, the possibility of the organization of an independent Russian immigrants party was still something people considered mostly in theory. In Likud, Alex Glasman said that in principle he still believes most of the immigrants will support the larger parties and not a marginal political movement such as an independent soviet party (interview, Tel Aviv, 28 August 1990). Also in Likud, MK Michael Kleiner said that such a possibility was "not serious." He continued, "I hope that Soviet Jewry is no less intelligent ... than

the Moroccan or Yemenite jews, and will react towards their own communally segregated people the same way Edot Hamizrach reacted towards such people: [i.e.] with contempt" (interview, 4 September 1990). In Labor, Shimon Alon said that while indeed there is a possibility new *olim* parties could run in the next elections, such a movement will probably get no more than one or two mandates (interview, 28 August 1990). In the Jewish Agency, Uri Gordon said the *olim* will probably try to organize into an independent party, but that such an attempt was "not meaningful" because "what can they say that would be different from Likud or Labor? That they are newcomers? That's not going to be enough. In terms of ideology, what will they say? ... They have a problem. They don't have anything special to offer" (interview, 31 August 1990). By the summer of 1991, however, there was an agreement among most parties that an immigrant party is indeed likely to run in the next Knesset election.

⁷³Poll published in *Bamakom*, 28 June 1991.

⁷⁴The questioner mentioned the following parties: Labor, Likud, Moledet, Ratz, Tehiya, Kach, Tzomet, Mapam, Hadash, Shinui, Agudat Yisrael.

⁷⁵Glasman interview, 30 June 1991.

⁷⁶Dayan interview, 27 June 1991.

⁷⁷Hefetz interview, 20 June 1991.

⁷⁸Blit interview, 27 June 1991.

⁷⁹*Bamakom*, 28 June 1991.

⁸⁰The Zionist Forum is a body unifying 26 *olim* associations. Its large budget comes mostly from the contribution of a Jewish millionaire, who gave the organization 20 million shekels.

⁸¹The Hebrew name of this organization is *Histadrut Oley Brit Hamootzot*.

⁸²Further affirmation that there is at least one list identified with Labor and one independent list was given by Alex Glasman (Likud), in an interview 30 June 1991.

⁸³PORI poll, "Soviet Jewish Immigrant Survey: October 1990".

⁸⁴*Reshet Yediot Tikshoret* poll, published in *Bamakom*, 14 July 1991.

⁸⁵In Hebrew, *Irgun Asirey Zion*.

⁸⁶*Bamakom*, 14 July 1991.

⁸⁷*Bamakom*, 14 July 1991.

⁸⁸Beni Ben-Tzur, General Secretary of Moledet, interview in Tel Aviv, 23 June 1991.

⁸⁹Kleiner, interview, 4 September 1990.

⁹⁰*Bamakom*, 28 June 1991.

⁹¹Dayan interview, 27 June 1991.

⁹²Blit interview, 27 June 1991.

⁹³Hefetz interview, 20 June 1991.

⁹⁴The June 1991 *Reshet Yediot Tikshoret* shows that while Sharansky enjoys the support of 37.6 percent of the immigrants, I. Nudel only enjoys five percent, E. Koznitzov enjoys four percent, Y. Kazadov three percent, and P. Paybloom only one percent. See *Bamakom*, 28 June 1991.

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